DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 770 CS 209 900

AUTHOR Bjork, Ulf Jonas
TITLE Red Roses Covering the Bloodstained Sidewalk: Context in the American Coverage of the Assassination of Olof Palme.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (69th, Norman, OK, August 3-6, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; Journalism; *Media Research; News Media; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; News Writing
IDENTIFIERS *Assassinations; Palme (Olof); Sweden

ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the coverage by 15 American newspapers of a single foreign news story, the assassination of Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme on February 28, 1986. Issues of the newspapers for the first week after the murder were examined and total coverage of the event, measured in number of words, was calculated for each paper. In addition, the study sought to assess the need for background information in stories from Sweden by examining how frequently that country was covered in the American press during 1985. Data revealed that all of the newspapers included in the survey contained at least some material regarding Palme's assassination. However, the results also suggested that more information providing context and explanation is needed when a story is set in a country geographically and culturally distant from that of a newspaper's readers. (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED271770

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RED ROSES COVERING THE BLOODSTAINED SIDEWALK: CONTEXT IN THE AMERICAN COVERAGE OF THE ASSASSINATION OF OLOF PALME

By

Ulf Jonas Bjork
School of Communications
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ulf Jonas Bjork

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to the International Division of the AEJMC Conference, Norman, Oklahoma, 1986.

CS 209 900

Foreign news coverage has frequently been criticized for lacking context, for portraying the world image "as composed of a string of dramatic events."[1] In the early 1950s, European foreign correspondents responding to a survey by the International Press Institute recommended more "balanced reporting with sufficient background" as a way to improve the American coverage.[2] Twenty-five years later, veteran news agency reporter Mort Rosenblum concluded a book on "reporting the world for America" by pointing to "special background articles which explain a major story in detail and in depth" as one way of "doing better."[3]

This paper discusses the use of background material by focusing on the coverage of a single foreign news story, the assassination of Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme on February 28, 1986. The study analyzed the coverage of 15 American newspapers for the March 1-8, the first week after the murder. Total coverage of the event (measured in number of words) was calculated for each paper. The amount of background information was estimated, and the quality of this information is discussed. In addition, the paper sought to assess the need for background information in stories from Sweden by examining how frequently the country was covered in the American press during one year, 1985.

Background Defined

Borrowing definitions used by Phillips Davison, Donald Shanor and Frederick Yu, the paper separated the event of a foreign news story from reactions and the scene, which, in this author's definition, make up the background.[4] Although scene and reactions are different, the two were not separated in this study, where the focus is on background information in general vis-a-vis event elements.

In the Palme story, the assassination and the subsequent police investigation belonged to the event: a murder can take place anywhere in the world, and in a reasonably ordered society it will be followed by an investigation if the killer is unknown. Scene and reaction elements, on the other hand, set the story in a specific place. As an example, reaction (both official and public) to a political murder in a society unaccustomed to violence will differ from that in a society where political violence is common. In the case of Sweden and Palme, both political leaders and Swedes in general were shocked by the occurrence of a political assassination, the first in almost 200 years. Accounts of the feelings and actions of average citizens and information designed to explain such reactions were classified as background information in this study, as were comments by official figures.

Finally, any facts about the general political situation in Sweden and the country's economy, geography and people (which, in the author's experience, is the journalistic meaning of the term "background") were also seen as background information.

COVERING SWEDEN: NEWS FROM A SMALL AND STABLE COUNTRY

It may be assumed that the more prominent a country is as a source of foreign news, the less the need is for background information in news stories: newspaper editors may expect a certain familiarity with the country on the part of readers, a familiarity built up by continued exposure to events there. Conversely, the need for background information would seem to increase the less frequent the coverage of a country: for a news story set in an unfamiliar country to make sense, readers need basic information about conditions there.[5]

Using Karl-Erik Rosengren's theory of "extra media data" as a means of predicting news flow, there is little reason to assume a large and steady flow of news from Sweden to the United States.[6] On several of the measurements proposed by Rosengren, Sweden scores low: the country is not geographically close to the United States, and its population is small, only 8.3 million. Although her economy is heavily export oriented, Sweden is not one of America's major trading partners, accounting for less than one per cent of American exports and imports.[7]

The normal flow of news from Sweden to the United States cannot be expected to be large, then, and Sweden is also unlikely to generate what Al Hester calls "news storms," major events that break up the regular flow for a short period of time.[8] The country is economically developed and has a relatively homogeneous population. Politically, Sweden is stable: with the exception of six years in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the same party, the Social Democrats, has been in power since World War II. The

cornerstone of the country's foreign policy is neutrality, and Sweden consequently belongs to neither of the military alliances in Europe.9

Measuring the News Flow from Sweden to the United States

For the purpose of evaluating the American coverage of Sweden during 1985, this study constructed a universe of Swedish events, using Facts on File for 1985 and the year-end review of domestic events in one of the Stockholm dailies, the Svenska Dagbladet. There are some problems with both sources. Facts on File relies on some of the newspapers that this study evaluated for its compilation of facts, although the service also uses foreign papers and government publications and documents. The Svenska Dagbladet, on the other hand, is a purely Swedish source, but its review was limited to two pages, and a great deal of that space was taken up by photographs.10 Despite these shortcomings, the two sources were deemed acceptable for this study.

Facts on File and the Svenska Dagbladet listed 31 and 23 items, respectively, five of which overlapped and thus could be considered major events of the year: the first artificial heart transplant outside the U.S. in April, the most severe white-collar labor conflict in years in May, the death of former Prime Minister Tage Erlander in June, the national elections in September, and the death of the artificial heart recipient in November. The many items that were not mutually listed can be explained by a difference in emphasis: Facts on File stresses international relations and items about economics and business, while the Svenska Dagbladet review leaned toward human interest

stories. Merged, the two lists consisted of 49 different items.

To gauge the extent of coverage in the American press, the study used the 1985 indexes of eight leading newspapers: the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Chicago Tribune, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, and the Atlanta Constitution. Of these, the first four were included in the sample of papers covering the assassination. Relying on content studies of overall coverage of foreign news, this paper assumed that the eight papers would be superior to average American newspapers in quantity of coverage, since they are all either national or regional leaders.[11]

Table I shows the extent of each paper's coverage. The New York Times stands out, surpassing even the Facts on File/Svenska Dagbladet list. Alone among the papers, the Times fairly regularly covered developments in exchange rates, unemployment, and consumer prices, and over half of its items were exclusives, published by none of the others.

Of the five stories discussed above, only one, the elections, was covered by all the papers. The Post and the Monitor ignored the artificial heart transplant stories, and the two papers did not cover the labor conflict either. Neither did the Globe and the Chronicle. Erlander's death, finally, was noted only by the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Tribune. Two other stories were covered by a majority of the papers: a leak of sulphuric acid gas in the western town of Karlskoga in mid-January and Olof Palme's meeting with five other heads of state to discuss disarmament in New Delhi in late

January. The relatively small number of stories that the papers covered together can be seen as an indication of the type of news that emanates from Sweden: few items are of worldwide significance.

Table I. The amount of coverage of Swedish news during 1985 (measured in number of entries in the respective indexes).

New York Times	67
Facts on File/Svenska Dagbladet	49
Chicago Tribune	35
Atlanta Constitution	29
Los Angeles Times	26
San Francisco Chronicle	21
Boston Globe	17
Christian Science Monitor	14
Washington Post	10

The table also provides an idea of the frequency of news items from Sweden. On the average, New York Times readers encounter a Swedish item every five days. In the other papers, Swedish news appears once a week or less often, down to the Washington Post's average of one item every five weeks.[12]

The purpose of this part of the study has not been to argue for more news from Sweden in American papers. What the above section should show, however, is that news about Sweden is rather infrequent even in elite papers. Background information is thus needed when a major news story breaks.

THE PALME ASSASSINATION: THE OUTBREAK OF A 'NEWS STORM'

On March 1, 1986, Sweden was on the front pages of newspapers across America, as large headlines announced the murder of Olof Palme on a snowy Stockholm sidewalk the previous night.[13] The

event shocked Sweden and took the world by surprise: as several papers pointed out, it was the first assassination of a European head of state since 1939 and the first in Sweden since 1792.[14]

Even without this perspective, however, the slaying had the elements of a major foreign news story. As one editorial put it, the assassination of Palme "touch[ed] many who had known neither him nor his country":

> In a sense we were all walking with the prime minister and his wife down the Sveavagen, sharing their sense of security and relaxation, in gentle reflection of the evening's motion picture and the brief encounter with their son a minute before. And then also sharing the sudden devastation that a single pistol and two bullets wrought.
>
> Until that moment we had somehow forgotten: There is no sanctuary, no hiding place, anywhere.[15]

Students of news evaluation have listed characteristics that determine what events become foreign news, and the Palme story had most of these: it involved an elite person, a national leader; it was an act of violence, a negative event; it was unambiguous, since a murder is a relatively simple event; it was unexpected; and it was timely, as the assassination had run its course by the time the newspapers went to press.[16]

In addition, it took place on Friday night, which meant publication on Saturday, a traditionally slow news day (and follow-ups on Sunday, an even slower day). Competition from other foreign news stories was also relatively small: the major development of the preceding weeks, the outcome of the election in the Philippines, had lost some intensity with the departure of

President Ferdinand Marcos a few days before.17

The assassination focused attention on Sweden for the next few days as police began their search for the killer. As the first week of March wore on, stories in the American press became less frequent and less extensive. As an example, total coverage of the newspapers in this study went from 10,000 and 15,000 words on March 1 and 2 to 1,200 words March 8. Even the Swedish press was paying less attention to the assassination by the end of the week: the Svenska Dagbladet, for instance, devoted one page to Palme-related stories on March 8, down from three-four pages a few days earlier.

Coverage continued in the form of occasional police reports and in accounts of Palme's funeral on March 15, but the main story, the assassination itself, appeared to have run its course by the first week. Consequently, this paper examined the coverage of the first eight days, March 1-8, only.

THE NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR GENERAL COVERAGE

The 15 newspapers of this study were selected with the purpose of examining elite national papers like the New York Times as well as smaller papers. Availability governed the selection to some extent: the author had immediate access to most newspapers of the Pacific Northwest, so this region provided the non-elite, local papers. The papers and their circulations are listed below.

As mentioned above, all 15 papers covered the Palme assassination over a number of days. This is, perhaps, an indication of the magnitude of the story, since the smaller

papers have a strong orientation toward local news and normally publish relatively few foreign news items. Table II shows the coverage in absolute terms and the number of days that stories from Sweden were published.[18] (The figures are for news columns only; comments and columns on the editorial pages are not included.)

Table II. Quantity and frequency of coverage, and circulations.

	Coverage in thousands of words*	Number of days with Swedish stories	Circulation in thousands of copies**
New York Times	8.68	7	935
Oregonian (Portland, OR)	6.60	8	289
San Francisco Chronicle	5.12	7	536
Los Angeles Times	4.64	6	1,047
Seattle Times	4.04	6	223
Spokesman-Review (Spokane, WA)	3.99	6	83
Anchorage (AL) Daily News	3.66	6	48
Bellingham (WA) Herald	3.57	7	21
Christian Science Monitor****	2.34	4	141
Tacoma (WA) News Tribune	1.92	5	105
Walla Walla(WA) Union-Bulletin***	1.72	3	16
Tri-City Herald (WA)	1.48	4	34
Idaho Statesman (Boise, ID)	1.25	4	57
Bellevue (WA) Journal-American	1.10	6	27
USA Today****	0.42	4	1,247

*The number of words was calculated by counting all words in the first five paragraphs of each story; dividing the number of words by the number of lines yielded an average that was multiplied by the story's total number of lines.
**weekday circulations obtained from Editor and Publisher Yearbook, 1985
***not published Saturdays
****not published Saturdays and Sundays

As could be expected from the review of Swedish news in 1985, the New York Times coverage was the most extensive, exceeding that of second-spot Oregonian by almost 40 percent.

What is surprising is the relatively low position of the Los Angeles Times, the leading newspaper on the West Coast; the Chronicle and the Oregonian, both smaller papers, surpassed the Times in quantity of coverage. The relatively high placement of the Anchorage Daily News and the Bellingham Herald is also noteworthy, since both have circulations under 50,000.

The study also examined the sources of the news stories. As mentioned above, Sweden is not a major generator of foreign news, and, as far as could be established, none of the papers have regular Stockholm bureaus comparable with those in Paris, London and Bonn.[19] On a day-to-day basis, four of the major news agencies have bureaus in the city, according to the 1985 Stockholm Telephone Directory: AP, Reuter's, AFP and DPA. The first day's reports about the assassination came exclusively from news services, even in the case of newspapers that later used correspondents of their own.

The sources for each paper are listed in Table III. For newspapers compiling reports from several news services, the services available to each are listed as well.

The dominance of the AP, credited for 55 exclusive reports (and making up a substantial part of the compiled accounts), is obvious. Three of the small papers have no other news service, but even among the larger papers AP stories dominated. Both the Tacoma News Tribune and the Anchorage Daily News have the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor services but used neither in their coverage, despite the fact that both services had correspondents filing stories from Stockholm after a few

days.[20] Also noteworthy is the popularity of the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post service (which offered only Los Angeles Times stories in this study), credited for eight stories not in the Los Angeles Times itself. In comparison, only two papers beside the New York Times used that paper's stories.[21]

Table III. Sources for news stories from Sweden March 1-8, 1986 (number of stories within parenthesis).

New York Times	NYT(11), UPI(1), AP(1)
Oregonian	AP(9), LAT(2), KnR(1), NYT(1)
San Francisco Chronicle	AP(5), LAT(2), NYT(1), UPI(1)
Los Angeles Times	LAT(4), compilation(2)*
Seattle Times	compilation(6)**, AP(4), Rt(1)
Spokesman-Review	AP(7), KnR(1), compilation(1)***
Anchorage Daily News	AP(5), LAT(1), UPI(1)
Bellingham Herald	AP(9)
Christian Science Monitor	CSM(3), compilation(2)****
Tacoma News Tribune	AP(4), LAT(1)
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin	AP(3)
Tri-City Herald	AP(3), LAT(2)
Idaho Statesman	AP(2), DPA(1), LAT(1)
Bellevue Journal-American	AP(6)
USA Today	GNS(3), own story(1)

NYT = New York Times
LAT = Los Angeles Times
KnR = Knight Ridder
GNS = Gannett News Services
Rt = Reuter's

*The Los Angeles Times has the services of AP, UPI, Reuter's, and AFP among the internationals.
**The Seattle Times has AP, LAT, UPI, KnR, NYT, INA.
***The Spokesman-Review has AP, NYT, KnR, IPS.
****The Monitor has LAT.
(Source: Editor and Publisher Yearbook, 1985)

As the above section suggests, the Palme assassination was quite consistently covered in all fifteen newspapers, with even the smaller papers publishing stories at least every other day the week after the murder.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN THE PALME STORIES

To compare the use of background by the 15 newspapers, this study calculated the share of that kind of information in the overall coverage. In addition to the examples listed in the introduction (comments and reactions by officials and average citizens), the study also classified obituaries as background, since they provided a sense of who Palme was and what his role had been in foreign and domestic politics. The steps taken by the government and the ruling Social Democratic party to install Ingvar Carlsson as Palme's successor were also deemed to be background information, since references to Carlsson contained a great deal of information about Sweden's parliamentary system. Moreover, this aspect of the story also described a process that would have been the same, on the whole, had Palme decided to step down.

While the police investigation in itself was classified as a part of the event, certain aspects of it were judged to be background. As an example, reports that the police suspected West German and Kurdish terrorists did not constitute background information, but explanations that both groups had carried out terrorist acts in Sweden in the past did.

Table IV shows the total amount of background information and its share of overall coverage for each of the newspapers. Perhaps most noteworthy is the leading position of the Christian Science Monitor. Most likely this is due to the Monitor's emphasis on in-depth stories explains the high percentage of background information, but it should be remembered that the paper is not published on Saturdays and Sundays, the first two

days of the Palme story. The first Monitor article on Monday thus dealt with a story whose event elements were rather old. (The stories of the other non-weekend paper, USA Today, also contained a relatively high proportion of background.)

Table IV. Proportion of background information and overall amount of background.

	Background as percentage of overall coverage	Amount of background in thousands of words
Christian Science Monitor	92	2.16
New York Times	74	6.46
Seattle Times	59	2.38
San Francisco Chronicle	55	2.84
Spokesman-Review	53	2.12
Oregonian	48	3.18
USA Today	48	0.20
Bellingham Herald	48	1.70
Los Angeles Times	46	2.12
Anchorage Daily News	41	1.52
Idaho Statesman	32	0.40
Tacoma News Tribune	26	0.50
Tri-City Herald	26	0.40
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin	12	0.20
Bellevue Journal-American	3	0.03

Next to the Monitor, the New York Times stands out with three quarters of its coverage devoted to background. Overall, papers with extensive total coverage provided a high degree of background information: the Seattle Times, the Chronicle, the Spokesman-Review, the Los Angeles Times and the Oregonian all gave the whole story between 4,000 and 6,000 words; of these, 2,000-3,000 were background. The papers whose share of background information was around 50 percent are, for the most part, the regional leaders. The high share of background in the Bellingham

Herald should be noted, however. In the other small papers, background accounted for one third or less of total coverage.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Saturday, March 1

For the story's first day, AP bulletins overwhelmingly dominated as sources: only the New York Times and the Idaho Statesman used other news services, while the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Times combined the AP with other services. The wire services concentrated on the "event" elements of the story, such as the Palmes walking home from a movie when the killing took place, the assassin disappearing after shooting the prime minister, and police taking steps to catch the killer.

There were background elements in the dispatches as well, however. The AP noted that it was the first assassination in Sweden for nearly 200 years, and the UPI furnished a list of assassinated heads of state.[22] Also included were reactions from Palme's successor, Ingvar Carlsson, and head opposition leader Ulf Adelsohn.[23] Several services provided obituaries where references were made to Palme's role in building the Swedish welfare state and the fortunes of his party, the Social Democrats, during his years in power.[24] In addition, the AP sent out a general background sidebar on Sweden, containing facts on population, country, geography, and economy.[25]

The amount of background information differed, however, even when the original source was the same.[26] Several of the smaller papers cut the reactions of Swedish leaders and the reference to the last Swedish political assassination 200 years ago, two

pieces of information that offered some explanation as to why Sweden was so stunned by the murder.[27]

On the other hand, the combination of several services could yield a great deal of background information. The Seattle Times drew on a number of services to produce three articles. The first described Palme's domestic and foreign politics and how these had been received by the public in the form of election results, the second article focused on the details of the assassination but also described the steps that Palme's successor had to take to become the country's new prime minister, and the final piece described the mood of "stunned disbelief" in Sweden, mentioning mourners around the spot where Palme was killed.[28]

Sunday, March 2

By the story's second day, both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times had their own correspondents in Stockholm, as had the Knight-Ridder news service, and all three produced accounts with background information. The New York Times' Joseph Lelyveld brought up the popular suspicion that foreigners had killed Palme, the implications of his death for Sweden's international profile, and the display of grief in Stockholm.

Tyler Marshall of the Los Angeles Times put the murder against the background of the stability of the Swedish welfare state, the low crime rate and the country's long period of peace; Marshall's article also mentioned rising criticism in Sweden of Palme's policies.[29] Knight-Ridder's Kitty McKinsey, finally, filed a story summing up the reactions of political leaders and

men and women in the street, comparing the impact of Palme's death on Swedes to that of John F. Kennedy on Americans.[30]

Public reaction was mentioned in the AP dispatches as well, which told of 10,000 people gathering in a Stockholm square and related despondent statements by average citizens. Looking to the future, officials expressed a fear of increasing xenophobia if the killer should turn out to be a foreigner. Finally, the AP stories pointed to the threat of the assassination to the Swedish tradition of politics by consensus.[31]

In general, the Sunday accounts of the newspapers included the public expression of grief, as well as reactions from political leaders. Still, some papers left out sections designed to explain, again, what accounted for these reactions. As an example, the Anchorage Daily News left out all the background paragraphs in Tyler Marshall's article, while the Tacoma News-Tribune took out everything but Stockholm citizens holding a vigil at the site of the murder and the tear-filled reaction of the Swedish cabinet. Among the six papers relying exclusively on the AP, only two, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Bellingham Herald, chose to publish the background piece discussed above in full.[32] Most simply settled for the image of grieving Swedes covering the bloodstained sidewalk with flowers as a way to show public reaction.

Monday, March 3

By Monday, stories began to limit themselves to police theories about the murder. The New York Times and Los Angeles Times stories still dwelt on public reaction and the explanation for

it, bringing up the comparatively low level of violence in Sweden, but the AP dispatches had no such background information.

Background information dominated the articles of the sample's two newspapers lacking Saturday and Sunday editions, however. Dealing with a three-day old story for the first time on Monday, USA Today chose to focus on public reaction rather than the details of the murder: its article had a man-in-the-street quote and explained that Swedes had spent the weekend trying to come to terms with the "most traumatic event in recent history."[33]

The Christian Science Monitor all but ignored the murder itself and dealt instead with its implications for Swedish politics. In its first article on the subject, filed from Stockholm by Elizabeth Pond, the Monitor brought up Palme's stature in his home country, the Swedish attitude toward the welfare state, the danger of xenophobia, and the threat to the tradition of openness and tolerance.[34]

Tuesday, March 4, and Wednesday, March 5

The Monitor continued to explore Sweden's future after Palme on Tuesday, when six of the sample's 15 papers carried no items from Sweden.[35] This time the article focused on foreign policy, featuring an interview with a senior Swedish diplomat. In another article, the paper speculated about the killer's identity, providing extensive histories of terrorist groups in Sweden.[36]

The New York Times was the only other paper still to provide background articles on Tuesday, focusing this time on Palme's policies and how they had fared in a hardening economic climate. The Times also ran an account of Ingvar Carlsson's first press

conference as leader of the caretaker government. Carlsson's announcement that Palme's policies would continue was noted by the Los Angeles Times and the Oregonian as well.[37]

The final background articles during the first week after the assassination were provided by the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday. Joseph Lelyveld brought up the xenophobia theme once again in his interviews with students at Stockholm University, where fears of a more controlled society and less access to politicians also surfaced. Tyler Marshall also mentioned suspicion of foreigners in a country where the only political violence had occurred among immigrants.[38]

In the other papers, overall coverage had become sporadic by Wednesday, and the pieces that were published contained little background information. As the above discussion shows, however, newspaper and wire service correspondents had filed a considerable amount of background material during the news story's first three days.

CONCLUSIONS

In a 1953 criticism of international news coverage, Swedish foreign correspondent Sven Ahman thought readers in the United States would welcome an attempt by the press to "put the news in perspective."[39] Most of the time this was not done, Ahman claimed, but he admitted that the American press had performed well in its coverage of a major events, citing a serious Swedish-Soviet incident in the early 1950s as an example.

Thirty-three years later, Ahman's appraisal can be repeated, at least with regard to leading newspapers like the New York

Times and the Los Angeles Times. Both papers attempted (as did the correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor) to go beyond the details of the assassination of Olof Palme and the subsequent police investigation and provide explanations, context and reactions. The coverage of the Palme murder thus shows how a newspaper's own correspondents can leave the coverage of "event elements" to the wire service bulletins and supplement the wire services with more in-depth reporting.

Newspapers without their own correspondents can use the reports of correspondents of the major papers in the same way. Covering the Palme murder, regional leaders such as the Oregonian, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Seattle Times were able to provide background material by relying on the news services of the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times.

Readers who want more background information about foreign news than local papers provide should be aware of the prominence given to such material in papers like the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor.

Although the bulk of their output was concerned with the murder and the police investigation, traditional wire services like the AP and UPI provided background material as well. Relying papers did, solely on the AP for foreign news thus does not seem to deprive a smaller paper of access to background material. The Bellingham Herald is a case in point: the newspaper followed the Palme story for the first seven days, using AP bulletins as its only source. Almost half of the Herald's copy was background, giving readers general facts on Sweden, reactions by officials

and average citizens, a review of swedish politics under Palme, and a history of foreign terrorism in Sweden.

The lack of context in the coverage of some of the newspapers in this study seemed to stem not from insufficient access but from editorial decisions. Reactions and background information of paragraph length were cut from the Saturday AP dispatches, for instance, and whole sections of background information were taken out of articles supplied by the Los Angeles Times service on Sunday.

Overall, the foreign coverage of the New York Times should not be compared to that of a small newspaper in the Pacific Northwest, as space limitations and economic resources are vastly different. In the case of the Palme story, however, the use of foreign news space by the smaller papers can be questioned. The assassination itself was, broadly speaking, the story's only concrete development. The week-long coverage of the police investigation yielded little but theories, for instance. By Friday, March 7, all the people detained by police in Sweden and Denmark had been released, and there was still no suspect.40

Since most of the papers decided to follow the story throughout the first week, the content of the reports could have focused on public reaction to the murder and what the assassination meant to Sweden rather than on the speculations of the Stockholm police commissioner.

Although concerned with a single story in the global flow of news, this study may offer some general suggestions for the coverage of events abroad. There is little doubt that information providing context and explanation is needed when a story is set in

a country geographically and culturally distant from a newspaper's readers. At the same time, the space allotted to each story is limited; this is particularly the case with foreign news. One solution seems to be a more critical evaluation of a foreign story's event elements. May not, as the case of the murder theories of the Swedish police suggests, event developments be ignored in favor of background information on some days? What serves the readers best, an explanation without a direct news angle or the latest sketchy piece in "the string of dramatic events"?

Notes

[1]Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News," Journal of Peace Research 2(1965):64-91.

[2]International Press Institute, The Flow of the News (Zurich: International Press Institute, 1953), pp. 29-55; for the view from Sweden, see pp. 47-49.

[3]Mort Rosenblum, Coups and Earthquakes (New York: Harpers & Row, 1979), p. 218; see also W. Phillips Davison et al., "News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public," Foreign Policy Association Headline Series 250, August 1980, p. 14; Barry Rubin, International News and the American Media (The Washington Papers, vol. 5, no. 49, Beverly Hills and London, Sage Publications, 1977), pp. 65-66; and Walter Laqeur, "Foreign News Coverage: From Bad to Worse," Washington Journalism Review June 1983, pp. 32-35.

[4]Davison, pp. 18-21.

[5]Even when a country receives frequent coverage in the press of another country, background information may still be needed; see the case of two well-covered countries, Great Britain and the United States, in The Flow of the News.

[6]Karl-Erik Rosengren, "Four Types of Tables," Journal of Communication 27(1977):67-75; Gertrude Robinson and Vernone M. Sparks, "International News in the Canadian and American Press," Gazette 22(1976):203-18, found some problems in applying extra media data to American foreign coverage.

[7]United Nations International Trade Statistics Year Book

1983.

[8]Al Hester, "International Information Flow," in International and Intercultural Communication, ed. by Heinz-Dietrich Fischer and John C. Merrill (New York: Hasting House Publications, 1976), p. 246.

[9]The stable nature of Swedish society is reflected in the news issued by the semi-official Swedish International Press Bureau for publication abroad: over half the items in the 1985 bulletin dealt with official statistics. The rest of the items are dominated by broad statements of government policy and the findings of official committees(Swedish International Press Bureau, SIP Newsletter from Sweden, 1985).

[10]Svenska Dagbladet, December 29, 1985, pp. III:8-9

[11]The newshole of elite and "average" papers is touched upon by Jim Hart, "Foreign News in U.S. and English Daily Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 43(1966):443-48; Al Hester, "An Analysis of News Flow from Developed and Developing Countries," Gazette 17(1971):29-43; George Gerbner and George Marvanyi, "The Many Worlds of the World's Press," Journal of Communication 27(1977):52-66; Robinson and Sparks, op. cit.; and Vilanilam, op. cit.

[12]Obviously, this kind of item count says nothing about the quality of the stories and thus works to the disadvantage of a newspaper like the Christian Science Monitor, which favors long in-depth articles; this study was more concerned about the frequency of Swedish stories, however, and settled for a solely quantitative measurement.

[13]All the newspapers in this sample which are published on Saturdays had the assassination on their front pages; in addition, the author checked nine leading regional papers, which all gave Palme's death front-page coverage: the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Detroit Free Press, the Denver Post, the Houston Post, the Boston Globe, the Washington Post, and the Atlanta Constitution; the Chicago Tribune had nothing about Palme anywhere in the paper on Saturday but gave the killing front-page play the next day.

[14]New York Times, March 1, p. 1; AP erroneously gave the year of the assassination of King Gustav III as 1772, not 1792, see the Oregonian, March 1, p. 1, and Tacoma News Tribune, March 1, p. 1.

[15]Los Angeles Times, March 4, 1986.

[16]The structure of foreign news was first discussed by Einar Ostgaard, "Factors Influencing the Flow of News," Journal of Peace Research 2(1965):39-63, and Galtung and Ruge; Galtung and Ruge's hypotheses have been further discussed by Ronald G. Hicks

and Avishag Gordon, "Foreign News Content in Israeli and U.S. Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 51(1974):639-44, "Gertrude Joch Robinson and Vernone M. Sparks, "International News in the Canadian and American Press," Gazette 22(1976):203-18, Sophia Peterson, "Foreign News Gatekeepers and Criteria of Newsworthiness," Journalism Quarterly 56(1979):116-25, Vernone M. Sparks and James P. Winter, "Public Interest in Foreign News," Gazette 26(1980):149-70, Winfried F. Schultz, "News Structure and People's Awareness of Political Events," Gazette 30(1982):139-53; and J.V. Vilanilam, "Foreign Policy as a Dominant Factor in Foreign News selection and Presentation," Gazette 32(1983):73-85.

[17]Other major international stories in late February were oriented more toward process than event, i.e. had less of a "hard news" quality; see Facts on File, February 28 and March 7, 1986.

[18]This study makes no statements about the relative proportion of space allotted to the Palme story; it should be remembered, however, that papers like the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times have more pages than the smaller papers and thus are less restricted by space considerations.

[19]The Christian Science Monitor, the New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times have bureaus in London; the latter two also have correspondents in Bonn and Paris (Editor and Publisher Year Book, 1985; Annuaire de la presse, de la publicite, et de la communication 1985; Stamm 1984, Presse- und Medienhandbuch, 1985); the Stockholm telephone directory lists none of three papers.

[20]The list of news services each newspaper subscribes to is from Editor and Publisher Year Book, 1985.

[21]According to Editor and Publisher Year Book, four papers in the sample have both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times services, while another two have either the New York Times or the Los Angeles Times.

[22]See, for instance, Oregonian, March 1, p. A1, for the Gustav III angle; San Francisco Chronicle, March 1, p. 12, has the UPI list.

[23]See Oregonian and Tacoma News Tribune, March 1.

[24]See Oregonian, Anchorage Daily News, Idaho Statesman, New York times, Seattle Times, and Los Angeles Times, March 1, for obituaries, either as separate articles or merged with the main article.

[25]The Spokesman-Review ran the AP sidebar on Saturday, while the Bellingham Herald used it on Sunday; the New York Times published its own sidebar, "Sweden at a glance," on Saturday.

[26]Difference in time zones seemed to matter little in this study; of the papers, only the New York Times and the Christian

Science Monitor are notably ahead in time and thus have earlier deadlines; the Idaho Statesman is one hour ahead of the papers of the West Coast states, but no significant differences in access to AP bulletins were evident; neither was this the case with the Anchorage Daily News, whose deadline is later than that of newspapers in Washington, Oregon, and California.

[27]The Bellingham Herald, the Spokesman-Review, the Tri-City Herald, the Idaho Statesman and the Bellevue Journal-American omitted references to the 1792 murder of King Gustav III; the first three papers also cut the reactions of Swedish leaders.

[28]Seattle Times, March 1, pp. A1, A3

[29]Marshall's article was used by three other papers, see the Oregonian, p. A1, the Anchorage Daily News, p. A7, and the Tacoma News Tribune, pp. A1, A3; all March 2.

[30]See the Oregonian, March 2, p. A14 for McKinsey's article.

[31]Bellingham Herald, March 2, p. A14.

[32]Although it used other services as well, the Seattle Times account was very similar to that of the Chronicle and the Herald (Seattle Times, March 2, p. A12).

[33]USA Today, March 3, p.4A; for USA Today's philosophy on foreign news, see Katharine Seelye, "Al Neuharth's technicolor baby," Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1983, pp. 29-35.

[34]Christian Science Monitor, March 3, pp. 1, 14.

[35]The Spokesman-Review, the Anchorage Daily News, the Seattle Times, the Idaho Statesman, the Tri-City Herald, and the Tacoma News Tribune.

[36]Christian Science Monitor, March 4, pp. 8-9.

[37]New York Times, p. 3; Los Angeles Times, p. I:8, Oregonian, p. A7; all March 4.

[38]New York Times, p. 6, Los Angeles Times, p. I:5; both March 5.

[39]Flow of the News, p. 47

[40]See, for instance, Oregonian, March 7.